TASKMASTER
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VIVA LAS VEGAS.
THIS TOWN WILL ALWAYS HAVE A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART, EVEN IF IT ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE.
IT USED TO BE A PLACE OF BUSINESS AND CLASS... A PLACE THE CRIMINAL ELITE WERE PROUD TO CALL HOME.
NOW IT'S JUST ANOTHER PIECE OF CORPORATE AMERICA-- FAMILY-FRIENDLY WITH 50% LESS CALORIES.
BUT IT'S NOT ALL GONE...
FORTUNATELY, THE ACTION'S STILL HERE AS LONG AS YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK...

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UNDERGROUND...
BENEATH THE SLOT TOURNAMENTS, MINIATURE STATUES OF LIBERTY AND INDOOR GONDOLAS...
BENEATH THE TACKY SHOWINESS AND GLITZ PLASTERED ON THE COVERS OF TRAVEL MAGAZINES...
THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE VEGAS I STILL LOVE...
WHERE THE ROLLERS ROLL HIGH, AND EVERYONE DEALS IN *BENJAMINS*.
IT'S DOWN HERE WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE *REAL* MONEY, AND IN MY PROFESSION THAT SUITS ME JUST FINE.
UNDERGROUND IS WHERE I WORK BEST.

THE NAME'S TASKMASTER AND I DEAL IN A RATHER UNIQUE BUSINESS: TASK FULFILLMENT.
BLESSED WITH A SKILL I CALL 'PHOTOGRAPHIC REFLEXES', I CAN REMEMBER AND REPRODUCE ANY ACTION I OBSERVE.
I'VE LEARNT FROM MORE SOURCES THAN MY PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY CAN REMEMBER. FROM HEROES TO VILLAINS; CAPTAIN AMERICA TO PUNISHER, IRON FIST TO ELEKTRA... ALL THEIR SKILLS ARE MINE FOR THE MIMICKING.
WITH THESE SKILLS, THERE'S NOTHING I CAN'T DO AND THAT'S AN ATTRACTIVE SELLING POINT.
I CAN PROVIDE ASSASSINATIONS, LARCENIES, ESPIONAGE... HELL, I'LL EVEN FORGE A FAKE CHECK IF THE PRICE IS RIGHT.
STAN LEE PRESENTS
THE RIGHT PRICE
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PRESIDENT
BIG...
SMALL...
THERE'S NO TASK I CAN'T MASTER.

THE TASK AT HAND: NAIL A SMALL-TIME CHUMP TRYING TO PULL A BIG-TIME SCAM.
HO'S BAR
THE OWNER OF THIS ESTABLISHMENT HAPPENS TO BE AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE.
ONE OF THE PATRONS IS WINNING A LITTLE TOO OFTEN FOR HIS LIKING. IT'S MY JOB TO DETERMINE WHAT HE'S DOING AND BUST HIM.
FROM BENEATH MY HOLO-GRAPHIC DISGUISE, I WATCH HIM PLAY A FEW HANDS AND LET MY RE-FLEXES GO TO WORK.
EVERY SUBTLE MOVEMENT HE PERFORMS I SEE...
...AND THE SLIGHTEST PHYSICAL NUANCE AND HABIT I REMEMBER.
THREE WINNING HANDS AND I'VE GOT IT.

WHA!--? HEY! WHAT'S GOING ON?!
COME WITH ME.
SECURITY! TAKE HIM TO THE MANAGER'S OFFICE.
WHAT THE HELL DO YA THINK YOU'RE DOIN'?! I AIN'T DONE NUTHIN'!
REALLY? I HAVE A PRETTY GOOD MEMORY, SO ALLOW ME TO REFRESH YOURS.
THIS MOVE SHOULD LOOK FAMILIAR TO YOU...
VOILÀ! BLACKJACK ON DEMAND.
IMPOSSIBLE...
...IT TOOK ME YEARS TO PERFECT THAT MOVE!
H-HOW DID YOU DO THAT?!
I'M A FAST LEARNER.

LATER IN THE MANAGER'S OFFICE.
THANKS FOR CATCHIN' THAT RAT.
JERK'S BEEN A DAMN TICK ON MY BUTT FOR WEEKS-- JUST COULDN'T FIGURE HIM OUT.
ANY APPENDAGES YOU'D LIKE MY GUYS TO BREAK OFF A'HIM FOR YA? A SOUVENIR RING FINGER MAYBE...
TEMPTING, BUT YOU KNOW ME, JONESY. THE ONLY DIGITS I COLLECT ARE ONES FOLLOWED BY LOTS OF ZEROES.
HAHA! A'RIGHT, A'RIGHT.
HAVE A DRINK, BUT DO ME A FAVOR AND TAKE OFF THE PRETTY-BOY GET-UP. FEELS LIKE I'M TALKIN' TO A DAMN GQ MODEL.
DON'T LIKE THE NEW IMAGE?
NAH, IT'S LIKE YOU'RE NOT EVEN YOURSELF NO MORE. YOU EVEN TALK DIFFERENT!
STRICTLY BUSINESS. I DISCOVERED I ATTRACTED A WIDER RANGE OF CLIENTS WHEN I DIDN'T SOUND OR ACT LIKE A BRONX THUG-- EVEN IF I AM ONE.
SPEAKING OF BUSINESS, HERE'S YOUR FEE.
AND IF YOU DON'T MIND MY ASKIN', HOW'S THAT SCHOOL O' YOURS GOIN'? STILL TEACHIN' WANNABE CROOKS?
YEAH, BUT I'M DOING MORE SOLO, WORK-FOR-HIRE JOBS NOW.
IT'S MORE LUCRATIVE-- AND A LOT MORE INTERESTING THAN TEACHING IDIOT STUDENTS IN MONTHS WHAT I LEARNED IN SECONDS.
CLINK
WELL, GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR NEW GIG. TO SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY.
SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY.

LATER...
DAMN, I HAVE TO REMEMBER TO STOP TRYING TO OUTDRINK JONESY. THE BOOZER MUST BLEED VODKA...
HAIL, Oh, ANCIENT CASINO GODS! BLESS THESE DICE 'CAUSE MAMA NEEDS A NEW S.U.V.!
SNAKE-EYES! SORRY, MA'AM.
MAN! THIS IS NOT MY LUCKY DAY!
I THINK YOUR LUCK IS ABOUT TO CHANGE...
IF I HIT THREE SEVENS IN A ROW, WE WERE DESTINED TO GO OUT TO DINNER THIS FRIDAY. IF I LOSE, I'LL PAY YOU BACK DOUBLE AND WE'LL KNOW IT WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE. AGREED?
Huh?
DO YOU BELIEVE IN FATE?
BUDDY, THINK I'D BE IN THIS PLACE IF I DIDN'T?
GOOD, BECAUSE THOSE CASINO GODS OF YOURS WANTED ME TO GIVE YOU A SIGN.
HELL, IF YOU'VE GOT THE MONEY TO BACK IT UP, GO AHEAD AND ROLL.

SEVEN WINS!
SEVEN WINS!
SEVEN WINS!
...
THE GODS HAVE SPOKEN.
WE WOULDN'T WANT TO DISOBEY THEM, SO HERE'S MY CARD. I'LL SEE YOU ON FRIDAY. GOOD NIGHT.
HOLD ON, Mr. SMOOTH OPERATOR. YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW MY NAME!
YOU CAN TELL ME OVER DINNER.
SANDI, THAT'S ONE SERIOUS SCREWBALL...
Task Fulfilled
T. Master
Heh. I THINK I LIKE HIM ALREADY...

LATER...
507
HOME SWEET HOME.
YOU HAVE SIX UNHEARD VOICE MESSAGES.
BEEP!
HELLO, SIR, THIS IS GIL FROM AQUARAMA...
...I WANTED TO UPDATE YOU ON THE STATUS OF THE YACHT YOU ORDERED. THE CONSTRUCTION IS ALMOST COMPLETE, BUT THERE WILL BE A THREE DAY DELAY AS WE HAVE TO ORDER IN SOME CUSTOM PARTS FROM GERMANY. SORRY FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS. THANKS.
BEEP!
BAINTRONICS' SUNSET BAIN...
Subscribe
Save Big
Home
Inbox
Compose
Delete
Block
Put in Folder...
From
Sunset Bain
TM Institute
UltraPremium OLX Co
Lost & Found
Deadpool Inc.

THE FOLLOWING DAY. BAINTRONICS' NEW YORK OFFICE.
S. Bain
MS. BAIN, AM I INTERRUPTING?
NOT AT ALL, I JUST FINISHED READING. PLEASE HAVE A SEAT, TASKMASTER.
SIGH YOU KNOW, A LOT OF MEN IN THIS BUSINESS-- GOD REST THEIR SOULS-- NEVER COULD APPRECIATE THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE.
BORING AND PRAGMATIC, THEY'D ALWAYS THUMB THROUGH SUN TZU OR PERUSE ENDLESS POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNALS, NEVER LEAVING TIME TO ENJOY WHAT MATTERS-- SHAKESPEARE, HOMER, DANTE...
AND MILTON, I SEE.
YES, MY PERSONAL FAVORITE. WITH ALL THAT IS CHANGEABLE IN THIS LIFE, LITERATURE IS ONE OF THE FEW COMFORTING CONSTANTS.
I'D LOVE TO DISCUSS POETRY, BUT I AM A BUSY MAN...
OF COURSE.
STARK ENTERPRISES IS PERFORMING SOME RESEARCH AT ONE OF ITS LABS THAT I WISH TO SEE HALTED.
WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO FACILITATE THIS?
YES, BUT STARK ENTERPRISES IS A RATHER HIGH-PROFILE, NOT TO MENTION WELL-GUARDED, ESTABLISHMENT. A CONTRACT LIKE THIS WOULD CARRY A PREMIUM PRICE...
SAY ONE MILLION UP FRONT, ONE MILLION UPON COMPLETION, AND A 'WHY'.
A 'WHY'?
A 'WHY AM I SCREWING WITH STARK ENTERPRISES'?
Ah, YOU DON'T TRUST ME?
THAT'S MY PRICE. I'M MORE COMFORTABLE WHEN I HAVE A FEEL FOR MY EMPLOYER'S INTENTIONS.
I UNDERSTAND. VERY WELL...

IT'S NO SECRET THAT TONY AND I HAVE ALWAYS ENJOYED A LITTLE 'FRIENDLY' COMPETITION.*
RECENT REPORTS FROM SOME OF MY MORE, SHALL WE SAY, WELL PLACED SOURCES INDICATE THAT STARK IS DEVELOPING A NEW SEMICONDUCTOR TECHNOLOGY, GENERATIONS BEYOND THE MOST CURRENT TECH AVAILABLE.
HE STANDS TO MAKE YET ANOTHER FORTUNE AND PUT ME OUT OF BUSINESS IN ONE STROKE.
EVERYONE IN THE FIELD HAS THEIR EYES ON THIS MUCH ANTICIPATED PRODUCT. AS IF MY COMPANY'S IMPENDING DOOM AT THE HANDS OF THIS GRANDSTANDING PLAYBOY WEREN'T ENOUGH. AT THIS MOMENT-- MY ATTENTIONS ARE DIVIDED-- TELL ME, TASKMASTER, ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE CHINESE TRIADS?
"WHILE THE TRIAD GANG SYNDICATES HAVE EXISTED FOR YEARS, THEY HAVE BEEN PRIMARILY LIMITED TO ASIAN COMMUNITIES, STEERING CLEAR OF OUR TERRITORY. HOWEVER, AS THE TRIADS' POWER HAS ESCALATED OVER THE YEARS, SO HAS THEIR CONFIDENCE.
*SEE IRON MAN #18-20.
"THERE WAS EVEN A TIME WHERE I EMPLOYED SOME OF THEIR NUMBER AS 'SPECIALISTS', WORKING ON SOME OF MY MORE DELICATE SECURITY NEEDS. WHILE OUR ARRANGEMENT WAS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL FOR A TIME, THE TRIADS WATCHED FOR THE SLIGHTEST SIGN OF WEAKNESS, WAITING FOR THE TARGET THEY NEEDED.
WILSON FISK
"THEY DID NOT SHOW ME THE PROPER RESPECT AND ARROGANTLY SET THEIR LEGITIMATE BUSINESS FRONTS TO COMPETE DIRECTLY WITH MY OWN.
"I KNOW THERE IS A PLAN IN PLACE FOR THEM TO ACQUIRE STARK'S NEW TECHNOLOGY. AFTER YOU SABOTAGE THE PROJECT, HOWEVER, THEY WILL NEVER GET WHAT THEY WANT."
IS THAT A SUFFICIENT "WHY"?
QUITE.
GOOD THEN. MY ASSISTANT, Mr. ISLEY, WILL HAVE YOUR MILLION BROUGHT TO YOU IN CASH, ALONG WITH THE DATA YOU WILL NEED TO COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT.
PLEASURE DOING BUSINESS WITH YOU.

LATER THAT NIGHT. STARK ENTERPRISES LABS.
THE TASK AT HAND: INFILTRATE THE STARK LABS FOR SOME OLD FASHIONED INDUSTRIAL SABOTAGE.
AFTER A DOSE OF KNOCKOUT GAS, I'M IN THROUGH THE OUTER DEFENSES. I'LL HAVE ABOUT 15 MINUTES BEFORE THE NEXT SHIFT COMES THIS WAY, BUT I'LL BE LONG GONE BY THEN.
I TRY TO KEEP THE SECURITY GUARD-KILLING TO A MINIMUM-- POOR LOW-WAGE-EARNING SLOBS HAVE GOT IT HARD ENOUGH.
THEN I'M OFF TO USE THE HOURS OF STOCKPILED 007'S AND 'IMPOSSIBLE MISSIONS' THAT MY PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY HAS RETAINED FROM YEARS OF MOVIES AND TELEVISION.
THAT SURVEILLANCE VIDEO LOOP CIRCUIT THAT I PLANTED IN THE SECURITY SYSTEM SHOULD BE KICKING IN RIGHT ABOUT NOW....
...I'M NOT BASHFUL, BUT THIS IS NO TIME TO BE ON ANYONE'S CANDID CAMERA.
ONCE I'M DEEP WITHIN THE COMPLEX, THE SECURITY SYSTEMS GET TIGHTER, BUT THEY MIGHT AS WELL HAVE LEFT A KEY UNDER A WELCOME MAT.

THE PRESSURE AND SOUND-SENSITIVE FLOORING MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM IF I DIDN'T HAVE THE SILENT, WEIGHTLESS STEP OF A *NINJA* I OBSERVED IN JAPAN...
AND THE LASER DETECTION SYSTEM MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM IF I DIDN'T HAVE THE COMBINED ACROBATIC REPERTOIRE OF *SPIDER-MAN* AND *DAREDEVIL* AT MY DISPOSAL...
BUT I DO.
AND HERE IS THE REAL REASON SUNSET BAIN NEEDED ME: THE VOICE RECOGNITION SYSTEM.
ONLY SOMEONE WITH THE CORRECT VOICEPRINT CAN UNLOCK IT AND IT CAN DETECT VOICES BEING PLAYED BACK ON AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE.
TONY STARK. ACCESS CODE ROSEBUD.
ACCESS GRANTED. WELCOME TO THE LAB, MR. STARK.
I, ON THE OTHER HAND, CAN REPLAY VOICES THROUGH NATURAL MEANS. I THINK TONY STARK'S VOICE SHOULD DO...

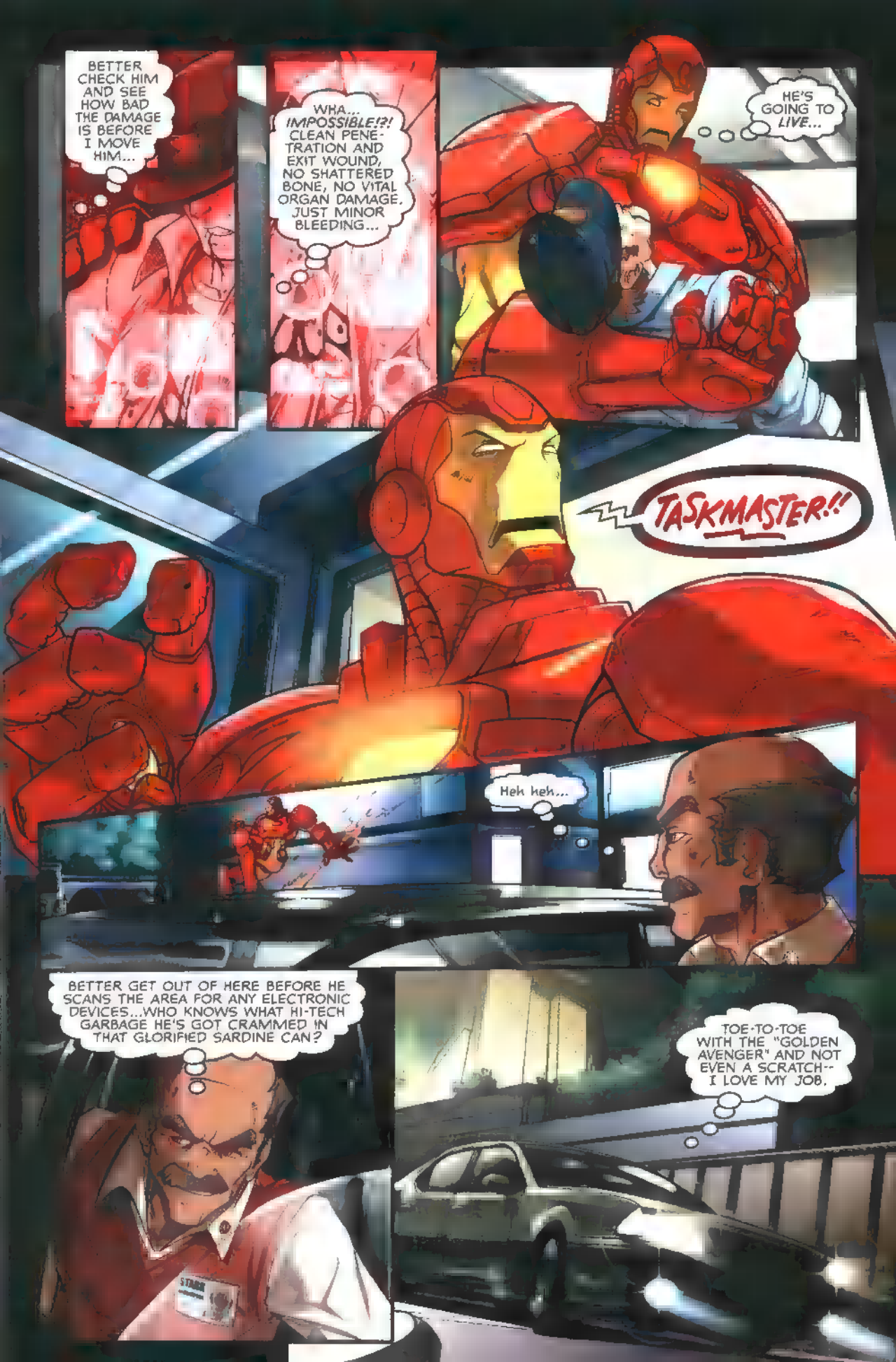
FIVE MINUTES LATER.
ALL BACKUP DISKS, TAPES AND SAMPLES LIQUEFIED WITH CORROSIVE ACID...
CHECK.
SZZZZZZZ
HSSS
ALL DATA STORED ON COMPUTER TERMINALS WIPED WITH A MAGNETIC FIELD SWEEP...
VVMMMMMMMM
CHECK.
FRZZZZZT!
THAT'S EVERYTHING. TIME TO GET OUT AND GET PAID.
I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE GOING ANYWHERE.

I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU WERE WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT, [redacted] MAN. YOU KNEW I WAS HERE?
WHEN YOU GOT PAST THE VOICE RECOGNITION SYSTEM, IT ALERTED ME THAT STARK HAD ENTERED THE LAB. STRANGE, CONSIDERING I WAS *WITH* Mr. STARK AT THE TIME. NOW YOU'LL [redacted] COMING WITH ME.
SORRY, BUT THERE'S QUITE A BIT OF MONEY I NEED TO COLLECT AFTER I LEAVE AND I DON'T WANT TO BE LATE.
STAY WHERE YOU ARE. YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE ON THE RECEIVING END OF THIS, EVEN WITH THAT NEW GEAR, TASKMASTER.
GLAD YOU STILL RECOGNIZE ME, CHUMP-- BUT I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE DOING MUCH BLASTING IN HERE.

HE'S GOTTA BE PRETTY PISSED OFF NOW, BUT THAT'S THE WAY I PLANNED IT.
WHILE THE MOVES I'VE PICKED UP FROM THE LIKES OF *SPIDER-MAN* AND *DAREDEVIL* HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INFINITELY USEFUL, IT'S THE *MIND GAMES* THEY PLAY WHEN FACING AN EXPONENTIALLY STRONGER OPPONENT THAT I'VE FOUND EQUALLY VALUABLE.
I WOULD *NEVER* BE ABLE TO DEFEAT IRON MAN HAND-TO-HAND-- I KNOW, BECAUSE I'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE. BUT IT'S THE EVADING, FEIGNING AND FOOLING THAT'S KEEPING HIM OFF BALANCE, JUST ENOUGH TO KEEP THE ADVANTAGE IN MY HANDS.
KRRANG!
NO WONDER *'VILLAINS'* HAVE SUCH A HARD TIME HANDLING THESE *'HEROES'*.
BLAST! YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T DODGE ME FOREVER!

MAYBE, BUT I STILL HAVE A *TRICK* UP MY SLEEVE.
A FEW WEEKS AGO I *BORROWED* A RATHER UNIQUE DEVICE FROM S.H.I.E.L.D....
A GENERATOR THAT CAN CREATE SOLID SHAPES OUT OF PURE ENERGY.
VZMMMMMMM
IT CAN EVEN TAKE THE SHAPE OF SOMETHING I'VE ALWAYS FOUND VERY USEFUL...
...CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SHIELD!
KLANG!
NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I HAVE SOME MONEY TO COLLECT.
IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP ME DOWN-- I'M NOT DONE WITH YOU YET!

BLAM!
BLAM!
GUNSHOTS!
DECISION TIME, IRON MAN.
NNGGGHHH...
I'VE RUPTURED THIS MAN'S SPLEEN AND COLLAPSED HIS RIGHT LUNG. YOU CAN PROBABLY SAVE HIM IF YOU FLY HIM TO THE NEAREST HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY...
...UNLESS YOU WANT TO CHASE ME WHILE HE BLEEDS TO DEATH.
DAMN YOU!
BYE-BYE.
HOLD ON, YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE IT! I'LL GET YOU OUT OF HERE!
NNGGHHH...


BETTER CHECK HIM AND SEE HOW BAD THE DAMAGE IS BEFORE I MOVE HIM...
WHA... IMPOSSIBLE!?! CLEAN PENETRATION AND EXIT WOUND, NO SHATTERED BONE, NO VITAL ORGAN DAMAGE, JUST MINOR BLEEDING...
HE'S GOING TO LIVE...
TASKMASTER!!
Heh heh...
BETTER GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE HE SCANS THE AREA FOR ANY ELECTRONIC DEVICES...WHO KNOWS WHAT HI-TECH GARBAGE HE'S GOT CRAMMED IN THAT GLORIFIED SARDINE CAN?
TOE-TO-TOE WITH THE "GOLDEN AVENGER" AND NOT EVEN A SCRATCH-- I LOVE MY JOB.

LATER, AT THE DELPHONIC'S DINER.
COFFEE, BLACK.
COZY PLACE FOR A PICKUP, ISLEY. PITY Ms. BAIN COULDN'T COME IN PERSON.
SHE DOESN'T LIKE DINING IN PLACES WITH QUITE THIS MUCH ATMOSPHERE.
WELL, I DON'T CARE WHO THE MESSENGER IS AS LONG AS THEY COME BEARING MONEY.
YOUR COMPENSATION IS IN THE BRIEFCASE AT YOUR FEET. NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT, I NEED TO STEP OUT TO MAKE A CALL. FEEL FREE TO COUNT IT IF YOU WISH.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT, I WILL.
YOU CAN TELL YOUR BOSS SHE'S LUCKY I'M NOT CHARGING HER EXTRA. I HAD AN UNEXPECTED RUN-IN WITH IRON MAN AND...

???
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!
AWWOOOO!
WOOOOOOO!
AW, YOU'RE KIDDIN' ME!
AWOOOOOOO!
SLAM!
AWWOOOO!
AWOOOOOOO!
AWWWOOOOOO
DROP YOUR WEAPON AND PUT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEAD!
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

Mr. ISLEY, WE'VE GOT THE ENTIRE DINER SURROUNDED. HE'S AS GOOD AS DEAD, SIR.
GOOD. CONTACT ME WHEN THE DEED IS DONE.
BUT REMEMBER TO BE *THOROUGH*, OFFICER DANIELS.
FAIL TO BRING US TASKMASTER'S *HEAD* AND OUR EMPLOYER WILL MOST SURELY HAVE *YOURS*.
AS I SAID, AIN'T *NO WAY* HE'LL BE LEAVIN' HERE *ALIVE*.
HELLO, Ms. BAIN. I JUST WANT TO INFORM YOU THAT ALL IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN. THE POLICE SHOULD BE SEALING TASKMASTER'S FATE SHORTLY.
PITY, HE COULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL.
PERHAPS. IF ONLY HE HAD NOT ASKED 'WHY'.
I SAID *DROP YOUR WEAPON!*
I KNOW YOU'RE HERE TO *KILL ME*, SO YOU CAN STOP THE *ACTING*, UNLESS YOU STILL WANT TO READ ME MY RIGHTS.

SO LET'S GET...
...IT...
...ON.
THE TASK AT HAND: TAKE OUT AN ENTIRE SQUAD OF *DIRTY COPS*, ESCAPE FROM AN ENCLOSED AREA THAT'S BEEN COMPLETELY *SURROUNDED*, AND LIVE TO TELL THE TALE.
NOT A PROBLEM.
DROP HIM!!
TO BE CONTINUED...